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INFANT  
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

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# INFANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

A DISCUSSION OF

THE ORIGIN AND CONTINUITY OF THE CHURCH,  
AND THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS.

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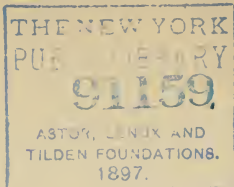
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NASHVILLE, TENN.:  
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN PUBLISHING HOUSE.  
1897.

★ R. K. BOWKER

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## INTRODUCTION.

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Some months ago the editor of *The Cumberland Presbyterian* requested me to write a series of articles for that paper on the subject of "Infant Church Membership." In complying with that request it was my purpose both to popularize and condense, as far as possible, the voluminous matter on this subject. The treatment of this question, in these pages, is in no sense exhaustive; but on the contrary a great deal that I would like to have said was shut out by the rules guiding me in the preparation of the articles. Every one may not agree with me as to what should have been included and what excluded in a treatise of this length.

The discussions are now brought together in this booklet, substantially as they appeared from week to week in the columns of *The Cumberland Presbyterian*. It is no easy matter to be original in the discussion of a question that has been so long under debate by leading scholars of the Church. If most of the arguments contained herein are not new to those who are familiar with the literature involved, it is hoped, nevertheless, that this little book may be of some service to those who have neither the time nor the means to wade through the thousands of pages that bear directly or indirectly on "Infant Church Membership."

J. V. STEPHENS.

Theological Seminary,  
Lebanon, Tenn.,  
April, 1897.



## INFANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

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The relation of infant children of members of the Church is clearly set forth in the early history of that institution. It is an element in the history of the Church which can be easily traced from the days of Abraham down to the present time. It is generally accepted that the children of the Hebrews sustained a peculiar relation to the Church, in view of the covenant which God made with his people. This is assumed in the present discussion which, in a brief outline, traces the subject down to about the close of the fourth century of the Christian era. The question is treated under the following heads: 1. The Jewish Church; II. The Transition of the Jewish into the Christian Church; III. The Christian Church; IV. The Fathers on the Continuity of the Church; V. Baptism versus Circumcision; VI. The New Testament on the Question; and VII. The Fathers on the Baptism of Infants.

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### I.—*THE JEWISH CHURCH.*

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Dean Stanley says that "the history of the Jewish Church is divided into three great periods." He regards Abraham, "the first figure in the long succession which has never since been broken," as the "Father of the universal Church." The first great period closes with the establishment of the Monarchy. The second coincides with the Monarchy, closing with the fall of Judah; while the third begins with the Babylonian Cap-

tivity, and closes with the evolution of the Christian Church.

Dr. Richard Beard has well said: "If the Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham, did not constitute a Church, then there was no Church in the world previous to the time of Christ." But the descendants of Abraham did constitute a Church. Stephen speaks of "the Church (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38). The Greek word *ekklesia* occurs in the New Testament over one hundred times, and is translated "Church" every time except three, in which instances it is rendered "Assembly." Moreover *ekklesia* of the New Testament corresponds to the word in the Old Testament which means "an assembly for divine worship."

The writer of Hebrews (iii. 3-6) tells us that God established a "House," in which Moses was a servant, and over which Christ presided. The "House" of Hebrews is the same thing as Stephen's "Church." This being true it follows that the Church existed in Egypt before the wilderness wanderings. On its Egyptian history Dr. Edersheim offers the following: "Three great observances here stand out prominently. Around them the faith and the worship alike of the ancient patriarchs, and afterwards of Israel, may be said to have clustered. They are: circumcision, sacrifices, and the Sabbath. We have direct testimony that the rite of circumcision was observed by Israel in Egypt."

This Church can be traced further back than the Egyptian bondage. Paul informs us that the gospel was preached unto Abraham (Gal. iii. 8). There has been but one gospel. It was preached to Abraham, and has been preached ever since. Timothy Dwight maintains that the work of Moses in the "House" of He-

brews, already mentioned, did not find its end "in itself but in what was to follow after him." It has been the same "House" (Church) from the days of Abraham until the present time; and Christ has been "over his own house" through all these ages, both before and since his incarnation.

It was God's plan to give the purest religion possible to the world. In order to do that it was necessary to develop a peculiar people—a nation wholly different from the nations about it. Professor Blaikie puts it thus: "It pleased God to make choice of a family to fulfill the high office of preserving pure and undefiled the true knowledge and worship of himself." Speaking of this family when it had developed into a nation, Professor McCurdy observes that "the greatest boon which any race or people ever conferred upon humanity, was that of religious truth and freedom, and this was the gift of the Hebrews."

God made a covenant with Abraham (Gen. xvii. 9-14). From this it is evident that the Hebrews and their infant children were members of this Church. According to the covenant "every man child" was to be circumcised. Dr. Edersheim says: "In token of the established covenant, God enjoined upon Abram and his descendants the rite of circumcision as a sign and a seal." Professor Orelli gives the symbolical meaning of the rite in this language: "The idea of bodily cleanliness forms the very basis, among the Israelites, for the religious rite of circumcision, but the idea of bodily cleanliness gradually grew into that of spiritual purity, such as was demanded of the chosen people of God: hence such expressions as those in Jer. vi. 10; Lev. xxvi. 41, the non-circumcision of the ear, the heart, etc. Finally the act

became the external token of the covenant between God and his people."

It has been seen that the descendants of Abraham sustained a peculiar relation to the covenant by birth, and that the Hebrews clearly recognized infant church membership. It is a fact that Gentiles, adults and infants, were on certain conditions admitted to membership in this Church. If the Gentiles did not sustain the relation by birth to the covenant, which the Hebrews did, they could, nevertheless, be brought under its gracious privileges. Gentiles who abandoned their own for the Jewish religion were called proselytes. Before inquiring how infants were made proselytes it will be necessary to consider how those who were able to choose for themselves became Jews.

1. *Adult Proselytes*.—It seems that two classes of proselytes were recognized. First, the "proselytes of the gate," who professed their faith in the God of Israel, and merely bound themselves to the observance of the so-called seven Noachic commandments; secondly, the "proselytes of righteousness," who became children of the covenant. It is the latter class only with which we are here concerned.

Dr. Schurer says: "It would appear according to the talmud, that on the occasion of admitting proselytes strictly so called into the Jewish communion three things were necessary: (1) circumcision; (2) baptism; *i. e.*, a bath with a view to Levitical purification; and (3) a sacrifice (literally, a gracious acceptance of blood). In the case of women only the last two were required." Dr. Alfred Edersheim, a scholarly Jew, not only agrees with Dr. Schurer, but affirms that "all writers are agreed" that the three things named above "were re-

quired for the admission of such proselytes;" and he adds, "If anything could have further enhanced the value of such proselytism, it would have been its supposed antiquity. Tradition traced it up to Abraham and Sarah."

Dr. William Wall wrote a very able "History of Infant Baptism," in which he quotes freely from the ablest authorities on this question. He gives the following from the great Jewish scholar, Maimonides: "And so in all ages when an ethnic is willing to enter the covenant, and gather himself under the wings of the majesty of God, and take upon him the yoke of the law, he must be circumcised, and baptized, and bring a sacrifice; or if it be a woman, be baptized, and bring a sacrifice. As it is written, as you are, so shall the stranger be. How are you? By circumcision and baptism and bringing of a sacrifice. So likewise the stranger (or proselyte) through all generations; by circumcision and baptism, and bringing of a sacrifice." It was claimed, "by three things, did Israel enter into the covenant, by circumcision, and baptism, and sacrifice. Circumcision was in Egypt, as it is written, *No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof*. Baptism was in the wilderness just before the giving of the law: as it is written, *Sanctify them to-day and to-morrow and let them wash their clothes*. And sacrifice; as it is said, *And he sent younga men of the children of Israel which offered burnt offerings*." He continues: "This solemn baptizing of proselytes differed from the rest of their divers baptism (which St. Paul, Heb. ix. 10, says were customary among the Jews) in this: that those others were upon new occasions of uncleanness, etc., many times repeated; but this was never given but once to one person. It was called (as Dr. Lightfoot shows)



'baptism for proselytism,' distinct from 'baptism for uncleanness.' "

2. *Infant Proselytes*.—On this question, Dr. Wall gives the following Jewish authority: "If with a proselyte his sons and his daughters be made proselytes; that which is done by their father redound to their good." The Jerusalem Misna says, "that if a girl, born of heathen parents, be made a proselyte after she be three years and a day old, then she is not to have such and such privileges there mentioned;" and that of the Babylon edition says, "that if she be made a proselyte before that age, she shall have the said privileges." These two authorities do not disagree. Their statements are made from different points of view. Thus it is seen "that a child of never so little age might by their custom be made a proselyte." The Gemara says, "they are wont to baptize such proselyte in infancy upon the profession of the House of Judgment (the court), for this is for his good.

"And the gloss there (having first put in an exception, that if the father of the child be alive and present, the child is baptized at his request; but if not, on the profession of the court) comments thus on those words: They are wont to baptize, 'because,' says the gloss, 'none is made a proselyte without circumcision and baptism.' Upon the profession of the House of judgment. "That is, the three men have the care of his baptism, according to the law of the baptism of proselytes, which requires three men, who do so become to him a father. And he is by them made a proselyte.' If a child were fatherless, and his mother brought him, they baptize him at her desire; but the court profess for him, as the Gemara says."

“A proselyte that is under age they are wont to baptize upon the knowledge (or profession) of the House of judgment (or court); because this is for his good”

We have already seen that “a child of never so little age might by their custom be made a proselyte.” The following will show the age up to which children were baptized as infants: Any male child of such a proselyte, that was under the age of thirteen years and a day, and females that were under twelve years and a day, they baptized as infants at the request and by the assent of the father, or the authority of the court; because such an one was not yet the son of ascent, as they phrase it, i. e., not capable to give assent for himself, but the thing is for his good. If they were above that age they consented for themselves.”

What has been said of the baptism of the children of proselytes has reference only to the children born before the parents became proselytes, for those born afterwards were treated just as the children of the natural Jews.

It is admitted generally that the infants of the Jews were members of the Jewish Church. So there can be no question that infants were members of the Church in the days of our Savior. It has been shown that Gentiles were made proselytes to the Jewish religion, and that the infants of these proselytes were also made proselytes. Let the fact be noted that in the process of making these infants proselytes, they were baptized. The learned Dr. Lightfoot says: “The baptizing of infants was a thing as well known in the Church of the Jews, as ever it has been in the Christian Church.”

## II.—*THE TRANSITION OF THE JEWISH INTO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.*

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Professor George P. Fisher says: "Christianity was born of Judaism: it was the offspring of the Old Testament religion." Christ did not define the relation of the new to the old. Naturally, the expulsive power under the New Dispensation, gradually drove out those things which were peculiar to the old dispensation, and which were in the way of the Church's becoming world-wide in its sympathy and endeavor. It is true that "Christ set forth the seminal ideas," which would in time, come to control the Church, but his method was that of fulfillment rather than that of destruction. He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

Christ did not formally abolish the ceremonial law. His teachings clearly indicate that sacrifices and ritual observances generally would be subordinated to that which was higher. Nowhere did he command the non-observance of the temple worship. He had nothing to say about circumcision. "That a certain precedence belonged to the Jews in respect to the opportunity of hearing the gospel was recognized in his own method of proceeding; but the gospel was to be preached to every creature, and faith was made the condition of salvation."

With no express command from the Lord to his disciples to cease worshiping in the temple, and practicing the rite of circumcision, we are not surprised that both



were kept up by Jewish Christians for forty years—until the destruction of Jerusalem. And when we consider Jewish exclusiveness, and the preference which the Master himself gave to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, we are not surprised that both time and providential leading were necessary to bridge the chasm between Jews and Gentiles.

On the day of Pentecost the apostles were endowed with power from heaven in order that they might be witnesses for Christ. Notwithstanding the fact that the commission directed them to “make disciples of all nations,” it seems that their labors were confined to the Jews exclusively for about seven years. It was thirteen years later before the council at Jerusalem decided that the Gentiles might be admitted to church membership without first becoming Jews. But even this did not end the controversy, which, as we learn from the Acts, and Paul’s epistles, and the writings of the Fathers continued many years more. It is our purpose to trace the most pronounced steps of this remarkable transition.

1. *The appointment of the seven deacons.*—Among the early Christians at Jerusalem were two classes. (1) The native Jews of Palestine and those of foreign birth who adhered strictly to their customs and used the Hebrew Scriptures. (2) The Hellenistic Jews from foreign lands who spoke Greek, used the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew Bible, and whose mode of life and thinking were Grecized. This second class made a complaint that their poor did not receive their share of the common fund. This led to the appointment of the seven deacons (Acts vi). The appointment of these men had an outcome not anticipated. “It started the church on its mission to evangelize the world.” It was this official

position which brought Stephen forward, with his burning eloquence, who was the forerunner of Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles.

2. *Preaching the gospel to the Samaritans.*—Stephen's zeal led to his martyrdom, and this in turn scattered the disciples abroad. "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." When the Church at Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had received the word, "they sent unto them Peter and John." The gift of the Holy Spirit was an unmistakable sign that God approved this course (Acts viii. 1-17).

Professor J. M. Stifler very forcibly says: "God's purposes and God's plans are very far reaching. We see now why the Samaritans were raised up more than six hundred years before, and why they had been preserved in their half and half character for centuries. They were neither Jews nor Gentiles. They were midway between these distant moral extremes. Jesus in his ministry never went distinctly among the heathen, said he was commissioned only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. xv. 24), but he honored these Samaritans (John iv). And now God uses them as a sort of half-way house from those in the covenant to those who were outside of it. They were the ladder without which even the believing Jew, hampered as he was by his scruples, could not have got down to the uncircumcised Gentile. The leap was too great. The gulf between the two extremes was social, religious, political—and the Samaritan bridged it. God plainly intended him for this from the first."

3. *Peter was sent by the Lord to Cornelius.*—Nothing short of divine direction would have led Peter to this Gentile. The divine approval was so manifest that the

Jews were constrained to admit the correctness of Peter's course, but this did not mean to the Jews that the door was thrown open to all Gentiles (Acts x. 1—xi. 18; xv. 1; Gal. ii. 12).

4. *The Work of Hellenistic Jewish Christians.*—Some of those who were scattered abroad on account of the persecution at Jerusalem went to Antioch and preached boldly to the Greek Gentiles as well as to the Jews. The result was that a great number of the heathen believed and turned to the Lord. Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch. He brought Paul thither, and they two continued their work there for a year. Again, it was manifest that God had blessed this forward step in the unfolding of his plans (Acts xi. 19-26).

5. *It was from Antioch that Barnabas and Saul, at the direction of the Holy Spirit, set out upon that first missionary journey,* which was the next step in the transition (Acts xiii. xiv.).

6. *The Conference at Jerusalem.*—Certain Judaizers went to Antioch and taught that the Gentiles must become Jews in order that they might be saved. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to confer with "the apostles and elders about this question." The conclusion reached was that there was no necessity for the Gentiles, who had turned to God, to be circumcised (Acts xv.). "The Gentile believers were looked upon as partakers of the great salvation, nothing being required of them except what was required of proselytes of the gate. They are the Christian Diaspora—they are even called so by Peter in his first epistle—and a certain precedence belongs to the Mother Church, to the Jewish believers, as the first heirs of the promise. The temple is still the great sanctuary of worship."

7. *Paul's rebuke to Peter* (Acts xv. 35; Gal. ii. 11-21).—Peter had eaten with the Gentiles, but when certain Judaizers came “he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.” Peter’s conduct effected Barnabas. “This crisis moved Paul to rebuke Peter in the presence of the Church, for his cowardly and insincere compliance” with the demands of the Judaizers.

8. *The second and third missionary journeys of Paul exerted a great influence in widening the scope of the gospel as first viewed by the Jewish Christians.*—Paul more than any other one person was instrumental in bringing in the Gentiles. His conception of the mission of the Church was much broader than that of any other apostle. His writings emphasize the doctrine of justification by faith, rather than by the observance of the law.

9. *The fall of Jerusalem.*—The temple remained through all the years up to Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem “the great sanctuary of worship.” Professor Fisher says: “There is no doubt that providential events had a decisive influence in breaking up the allegiance to the old ritual, of those who were not hopelessly wedded to it. In the year 66, began the great war, when the Jews of Palestine flung themselves with reckless courage into the deadly struggle with their Roman oppressors. In the year 70, Jerusalem was captured by Titus, and, amid horrible carnage, the temple was given to the flames.” Thus the center of Jewish worship was removed. In 132 A.D., Hadrian forbade the continuance of the rite of circumcision. He also built a heathen city on the site of Jerusalem. Dr. Emil Schurer says: “So long as Jerusalem lay in ruins, the Jews could cherish the hope of its restoration. The

founding of a heathen city, the erection of a heathen temple on the holy place, put an end to these hopes in a terrible manner."

Dr. Gustavus Oehler writes: "Jerusalem fell, because it knew not the time of her visitation (Luke xix. 44). Since these last words were spoken by her rejected Messiah (Matt. xxiii. 37 sq.), Jerusalem and the defiled temple are dedicated to destruction: the kingdom of God shall be taken from the Jewish people, and given to the heathen (Matt. xxi. 43). From that time on, till the final ruin, the elected residue is gathered from the ancient covenant people, which is to form the root of the new congregation of salvation, the branch into which the believing Gentiles were to be grafted. This congregation is now the Israel of God, which assumes all the prerogatives of the latter, becoming 'the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people' (1 Peter ii. 9), to which belong the divine promises."

"The elect residue" which had been "gathered from the ancient covenant people," and which formed "the root of the new congregation of salvation" was completely cut off from Judaism, and thus the transition of the Jewish into the Christian Church was complete.

### III.—*THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.*

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We have already traced the transition of the Church from its Jewish into its Christian form. It is now in place to make some inquiries concerning the Church under the New Dispensation. Dr. Knapp says, "The Christian Church, in the widest sense, may be defined to be the whole number of those who agree in worshipping God according to the doctrine of Jesus Christ." Dr. Neander maintains that Christ knew that the Word "contained the elements of a spiritual community that would burst asunder the confining forms of the Jewish Theocracy, and take all mankind into its wide embrace." Dr. Geikie thinks that the advent of the Messiah would "save Judaism from itself, by perpetuating that which was permanent in it under his holy and spiritual reign." Christ would discard all that was merely temporary and accidental in the Jewish Church, but at the same time he would bring into lasting prominence whatever of everlasting truth the Old Covenant contained. Dr. William Smith tells us that the Christian Church "formed one body, like the congregation of the Jewish people, from which it derived both its name and the model of its constitution;" and that it was "to replace Judaism as the witness for the one true God."

The Christian Church, then, is not an organization wholly separate and distinct in its origin from the Jew-



ish Church; but as we have seen, the transition of the Jewish Church gave to the world the Christian Church. The Church is one and the same. It has undergone changes, but its identity has not been destroyed. As a matter of convenience we speak of it under the Old Covenant as the Jewish Church, and under the New Covenant as the Christian Church. That which was "merely temporary and accidental" under the Old Dispensation came in time to be discarded; while that "which was permanent in it" passed over into the New Dispensation. Hence when we speak of the beginning of the Christian Church, we simply mean the opening of the New Dispensation, when the Church began to lop off the "temporary and accidental," but held on to "that which was permanent;" and added, from time to time, under the direction of Providence, other such things as were necessary to enable it to meet its new responsibilities in its efforts at world-wide endeavor. Under the Old Dispensation the Church was confined to one nation, but under the New Dispensation there is no such thing as national lines.

1. *The Old Testament points to a development and growth of the Church, which we find fulfilled under the New Covenant.*—We would naturally expect the prophets to enlighten the people of the Lord in reference to the future of his Church. In this we are not disappointed.

(1) A new covenant was promised. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jere. xxxi. 31). Note, that this new covenant was made with "the house of Israel," and with "the house of Judah;" hence the reference must be to

a coming time when the Church shall be enlarged. The Bible Commentary says: "The prophecy was fulfilled when those Jews who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, expanded the Jewish into the Christian Church. Many commentators so write as if the Christian Church were different from the Jewish, and as if Gentiles had converted the Jews, and written for them the New Testament. Really it is the Jewish Church in its full development and spiritual form, as foretold by Jeremiah."

(2) It was said that David's throne should be built up to all generations (Psa. lxxxix. 4). But it is true, so far as an earthly throne is concerned, that none of David's "seed" has reigned for over two thousand years. Has the prophecy failed? Daniel (ii. 44) said, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom," or as Dr. Young would translate the passage, "raise up a kingdom." The word here rendered "shall set up" is the same word used in Amos (ix. 11) translated "raise up," where it is said that God "will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen." James (Acts xv. 15, 16) claims that the prophecy of Amos had its fulfillment under the New Dispensation. The tabernacle of David was raised up. This means exactly the same thing as Daniel's kingdom, which was raised up; and in accordance with prophecy Christ assumed the throne of David, and has been reigning ever since. The prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter. David reigned over a small territory, but Christ, his son, reigns over many nations.

(3) The Gentiles were to be brought in. The Church was thus admonished: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habi-



tations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." The reason assigned for this is, that "thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles" (Isa. liv. 2, 3). "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. lx. 3). From the New Testament, and the history of the Church in subsequent times, we learn how literally these, and kindred prophecies have been fulfilled. The Old Testament writers anticipated many things which are recorded in the New Testament, and which have their fulfillment in the Christian Church, when, according to God's plan, the Jewish Church was transformed into the Christian.

2. *The New Testament shows that the Christian Church was a development of the Jewish Church.*—There can be no doubt that the roots of the Christian Church were planted deep in Hebrew soil. Had it been something entirely new, most certainly some record would have been made of its beginning. But no one is able to place his finger upon a New Testament passage and say, "Here is the beginning of the Church." There is great lack of unanimity among those who have endeavored to do so. Surely a thing so important as the organization of a Church would not be left in such doubt. The record of such an important event would be so plain that no one could mistake its meaning!

(1) Christ was himself a member of the Jewish Church. He was born under its covenant relation, circumcised, and brought up under its laws. He worshipped in the temple, and frequented the synagogues. He expounded the prophets, and showed that the Church was to enlarge its sphere of activities under the New Dispensation. He lived and died a member of the Jewish Church.

(2) The apostles that Christ gathered about him for training were all members of the Jewish Church. Professor Stifler is correct in saying that "neither before his ascension nor after it did Jesus teach the disciples to organize a Church." With the exception of Paul not one of the apostles ever received Christian baptism, so far as we have any record of the matter. And the same thing can be affirmed of the entire number of disciples assembled in that upper room on the day of Pentecost. It was just before the ascension of the Master that he commissioned the apostles to administer Christian baptism to those whom they should make disciples or proselytes.

As has already been pointed out under "the transition of the Jewish into the Christian Church," the apostles did not break off from Judaism for years. Perhaps some of them never did. The rite of circumcision was observed even after the council at Jerusalem, which determined that the Gentiles might come in without it (Acts xxi. 21). In the same chapter we find Paul taking a vow in order to prove to the Judaizers that he did not ignore the law.

(3) In the parable of the vineyard (Matt. xxi. 33-43), Jesus taught the Jews that the vineyard (Church) should be taken from them and let out to other husbandmen. "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Compare this parable with the prophecy in Psa. lxxx. 8-16; Jer. ii. 21; Isa. v. 1-7. So then, we learn that the Church (kingdom or vineyard) was first committed to the Hebrews, but when they proved unfaithful it was let out to the Gentiles.

(4) Paul represents the Church as an olive tree (Rom.xi. 17-24). The Jews "because of unbelief," he says, "were broken off." The believing Gentiles were grafted into this tree. Dr. Hackett says: "We have here a very expressive link between the prophecies of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Finally, in the argumentation of St. Paul concerning the relative positions of the Jews and Gentiles in the counsels of God, this tree supplies the basis of one of his most forcible allegories." Dr. Rice affirms that "the olive tree is the Church, from which the Jewish nation (so far as they rejected Christ) were broken off; into which the believing Gentiles were grafted, and into which the Jews, when converted to Christianity, shall be again introduced. The conclusion is inevitable, that the Church to which the Jews belonged is the same into which the Gentiles were brought."

The apostles were the branches of the olive tree, which were never broken off. The Jews who did not receive Christ "because of unbelief, were broken off;" hence when they did receive him, they were baptized into his name. This was true of Paul. But those who were not broken off "because of unbelief" did not receive Christian baptism, because they had all along been in the Church. This perhaps explains why the apostles, save Paul, never received Christian baptism.

In speaking of the Church, Dr. Beard says: "Changes have been made in some of its ordinances, and in its mode of administration and development; but the organization—the body—remains still the same. The changes which have been made have been such as are necessary to its more spiritual character. The service of the tabernacle, as the apostle expresses it, 'stood only

in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of the reformation.' And the service of the tabernacle is a representative of the services of the ancient Church. These services, however, have been superseded by others more simple and more spiritual. Still the Church is the same."

#### IV.—THE FATHERS ON THE CONTINUITY OF THE CHURCH.

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Attention has already been directed to the fact that the New Testament does not give any record of the organization of a new Church; but that it shows an unmistakable identity between the Church of the apostles and that of the prophets. In addition to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures on this question, it is interesting to inquire what the Fathers had to say on this subject. Their testimony is valuable as showing what was believed in their times on the continuity of the Church under the two dispensations, or the beginning of a new one just before their time. A few selections from their writings will suffice.

1. *Irenaeus*.—This man was born about A.D. 120, and lived to the close of the second century. In writing about the parable of the wicked husbandmen, he says: “By these words he clearly points out to his disciples one and the same householder—that is, one God the Father, who made all things by himself; while (he shows) that there are various husbandmen, some obstinate and proud, and worthless, and slayers of the Lord, but others who render him, with all obedience, the fruits in their seasons; and that is the same Householder who sends at one time his servants, at another his Son. From the Father, therefore, from whom the Son was sent to those husbandmen who slew him, from him also were the servants sent. . . .

“ Whom these men did therefore preach to the unbelievers as Lord, him did Christ teach to those who obey him; and the God who had called those of the former dispensation, is the same as he who has received those of the latter. In other words, he who at first used the law which entails bondage, is also he who did in after times (call his people) by means of adoption. For God planted the vineyard of the human race when at first he formed Adam and chose the fathers; then he let it out to husbandmen when he established the Mosaic dispensation: he hedged it round about, that is, he gave particular instructions with regard to their worship: he built a tower, (that is), he chose Jerusalem: he digged a winepress, that is, he prepared a receptacle of the prophetic spirit. And thus did he send prophets prior to the transmigration to Babylon, and after that event others again in greater number than the former, to seek the fruits. . . .

“ But last of all he sent to those unbelievers his own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom the wicked husbandmen cast out of the vineyard when they had slain him. Wherefore the Lord God did even give it up (no longer hedged around, but thrown open throughout the world) to other husbandmen, who render fruits in their season, —the beautiful elect tower being raised everywhere. For the illustratious Church is now everywhere, and everywhere is the winepress digged: because those who do receive the Spirit are everywhere. For inasmuch as the former have rejected the Son of God, and cast him out of the vineyard when they slew him, God has justly rejected them, and given to the Gentiles outside the vineyard the fruits of its cultivation.”



2. *Origen*.—This Father lived from about 185 A.D. to the middle of the third century. He says: "By the words of Christ we do not mean those only which he spake when he became man and tabernacled in the flesh; for before that time, Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the prophets. . . . It would not be difficult to show, in proof of this statement, out of the Holy Scriptures, how Moses or the prophets both spake and performed all they did through being filled with the Spirit of Christ."

3. *Cyprian*.—About the first half of the third century embraced the life of this writer. "In Isaiah: Rejoice, thou barren, that barest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: because many more are the children of the desolate one than of her who hath an husband. For the Lord hath said, enlarge the place of thy tabernacle, and of thy curtains, and fasten them: spare not, make long thy measures, and strengthen thy stakes: stretch forth yet to thy right hand and to thy left hand: and thy seed shall possess the nations, and shall inhabit the desert cities. Fear not because thou shalt overcome: nor be afraid because thou art cursed; for thou shalt forget thy eternal confusion." It is hardly necessary to say that Cyprian makes these words refer to the Church. He does the same with the following: "In Joel: Blow with the trumpet in Sion; sanctify a fast, and call a healing; assemble the people, sanctify the Church, gather the elders, collect the little ones that suck the breast."

4. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*.—"The Apostolic Constitutions are a compilation, the materials being derived from sources differing in age." "The first

six books were written at the end of the third century, the remaining two at the beginning of the fourth; at all events before the Council of Nicaea." In book I., section 1, it is said that "The Catholic Church is the plantation of God, and his beloved vineyard."

In book II., section 4, is the following: "Hear this, you of the laity also, the elect Church of God, For the people were formerly called 'The people of God,' and 'an holy nation.' You, therefore, are the holy and sacred 'Church of God, enrolled in heaven, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,' a bride adorned for the Lord God, a great Church, a faithful Church.

"Hear attentively now what was said formerly: oblations and tithes belong to Christ our High Priest, and to those who minister to him. . . . Hear, O thou Holy Catholic Church, who hast escaped the ten plagues, and hast received the ten commandments, and hast learned the law, and hast kept the faith, and hast believed in Jesus. . . .

"Those which were then the sacrifices now are prayers, and intercessions, and thanksgiving. Those which were then first-fruits, and tithes and offerings, and gifts, now are oblations, which are presented by holy bishops to the Lord God, through Jesus Christ, who has died for them.

"For these are your high priests, as the presbyters are your priests, and your present deacons instead of your Levites; as are also your readers, your singers, your porters, your deaconesses, your widows, your virgins, and your orphans: but he who is above all these is the High Priest."



5. *Eusebius*.—The historian, in showing that Christianity was not something new, says: “In this way will the antiquity and divinity of Christianity be shown to those who suppose it of recent and foreign origin, and imagined that it appeared only yesterday.”

6. *Augustin*.—In his exposition of the fifth psalm says: “Wherefore it is the voice of the Church in this psalm called to her inheritance, that she too may herself become the inheritance of the Lord.”

Again, he writes: “For the Church existed at first before the law; then under the law, which was given by Moses; then under grace, which was first made manifest in the coming of the Mediator. Not, indeed, that this grace was absent previously, but, in harmony with the arrangements of the time, it was veiled and hidden. For none, even of the just men of old, could find salvation apart from the faith of Christ; nor unless he had been known to them could their ministry have been used to convey prophecies concerning him to us, some more plain, and some more obscure.”

No word of comment is needed on these selections, which could be largely increased did space permit. These Church Fathers believed that the Church, of which they were members, was in existence in Old Testament times; yes, even “before the law.” How came they to hold to such an idea? It must have been because Christ and his apostles taught the same thing. We have already seen that this is the doctrine of both the Old and the New Testaments.

## V.—*BAPTISM VERSUS CIRCUMCISION.*

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Dr. Schaff says, "Circumcision was in the synagogue what baptism is in the Church, a divinely appointed sign and seal of the covenant of man with God." Dean Milman calls baptism "the substituted ceremony" for circumcision. Paul in writing to the Philippians (iii. 3) says, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit." To the Colossians (ii. 11) he says, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands." In commenting on this verse, Chrysostom said, "It is the body both in the one and the other case, but in the one it is carnally, in the other it is spiritually circumcised; but not as the Jews, for ye have not put off the flesh, but sins. When and where? In baptism." It has already been shown that Christ and his apostles were members of the Jewish Church; and that no new Church was organized by them, but that this Church was gradually transformed into the Christian Church. Dr. Neander well says that Christ "aimed rather to implant the germ, to give the initial impulse of a total intellectual renovation, by which men might be enabled to grasp, with a new spirit, the new truths of the kingdom of God." Circumcision which was a peculiar religious rite among the Jews had to be displaced by something which would be more applicable to the various nations to which the gospel was to be preached. Circumcision was regarded by the neighbors of the Jews as being not only a religious rite among

them, but also a kind of national peculiarity. Gentiles would have been slow to submit to it. While circumcision served its purpose well under the Old Dispensation, being a bloody rite and applicable to males only, it did not comport with the broader spirit of the gospel. Hence when Christ commissioned his apostles, he did not enjoin circumcision, but in its stead he named baptism "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19, R. V.).

We have already seen that three things were required of all the male proselytes, namely, circumcision, baptism, and a sacrifice; and that the two latter were required of every female proselyte. We are informed that the Pharisees and scribes would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte." The meaning of the Savior must have been perfectly understood by the apostles. The Church of which they were all members made proselytes from the nations as already indicated. Christ did not see fit to impose all the Jewish requirements upon prospective disciples, or proselytes, so he dropped the first and third—circumcision and sacrifice; and named baptism only. The rite which he selected for his Church under the New Dispensation, in its nature is suited to both sexes, of all ages, in all climes, in all times, and under all circumstances. This is in keeping with the spirit of world-wide evangelism on which the Church was to enter.

Paul tells us that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised (Rom. iv. 11). Cyril of

Jerusalem speaks of "circumcision as a seal of the faith" of Abraham; and says: "Following upon our faith, we receive like him the spiritual seal, being circumcised by the Holy Spirit through baptism, not in the foreskin of the body, but in the heart." See Deut. x. 16; Jere. iv. 4. Augustin says that "circumcision relates to what is a kind of seal of salvation." Eusebius and Gregory Nazianzen both refer to baptism as a seal. In the Pastor of Hermas we read that "the seal is the water."

Dr. McCalla quotes Epiphanius as follows: "The law had the circumcision in the flesh, serving for a time, till the great circumcision came, that is, baptism; which circumcises us from our sins, and seals us unto the name of God." Dr. Wall gives the following from Chrysostom: "But our circumcision, I mean the grace of baptism, gives cure without pain, and procures to us a thousand benefits, and fills us with the grace of the Spirit: and it has no determinate time, as that had; but one that is in the middle of it, or one that is in his old age, may receive this circumcision made without hands."

Augustin thus speaks of circumcision and baptism: "We can form a true conjecture of the value of the sacrament of baptism in the case of infants, from the parallel of circumcision, which was received by God's earlier people, and before receiving which Abraham was justified, as Cornelius also was enriched with the gift of the Holy Spirit before he was baptized. . . . As therefore in Abraham the justification of faith came first, and circumcision was added afterwards as the seal of faith; so in Cornelius the spiritual sanctification came first in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the sacrament of regeneration was added afterwards in the laver of

baptism. And as in Isaac, who was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, the seal of this righteousness of faith was given first, and afterwards, as he imitated the faith of his father, the righteousness itself followed as he grew up, of which the seal had been given before when he was an infant; so in infants, who are baptized, the sacrament of regeneration is given first, and if they maintain a Christian piety, conversion also in the heart will follow, of which the mysterious sign had gone before in the outward body."

"The same holy John," writes Dr. Wall, "even he as well as the martyr Cyprian, teaches that the circumcision of the flesh was commanded in way of a type of baptism. Then St. Austin adds, you see how this man established in the ecclesiastical doctrine compares circumcision to circumcision, and threat to threat: that which is not to be circumcised on the eighth day; that is not to be baptized in Christ: and what is to be cut off from his people; that is not to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And yet you (Pelagians) say that in the baptism of infants there is no putting off the flesh, i. e., no circumcision made without hands; when you affirm that they have nothing which needs to be put off: for you do not confess them to be dead in the uncircumcision of flesh, by which is meant sin, especially that sin which is derived originally."

Cyprian writes: "In respect to the observance of the eighth day in the Jewish circumcision of the flesh, a sacrament was given beforehand in shadow and usage; but when Christ came it was fulfilled in truth." Then he proceeds to show that it was not necessary to delay baptism until the eighth day.

Dr. Wall shows from Ambrose, that "neither a prose-

lyte that is old, nor an infant born in the house, is excepted; because every age is obnoxious to sin, and therefore every age is proper for the sacrament. He also applies this to spiritual circumcision and baptism, and says the meaning of the mystery is plain. Those born in the house are Jews, those bought with money are the Gentiles that believed: for the Church is bought with a price of Christ's blood. Therefore both Jew and Gentile, and all that believe, must learn to circumcise themselves from sin, that they may be saved. Both the home-born and the foreigner, the just and the sinful, must be circumcised by the forgiveness of sins, so as not to practice sin any more: for no person comes to the kingdom of heaven but by the sacrament of baptism."

Justin Martyr will close our list of citations on this question: "And we who have approached God through him, have received not carnal, but spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism."

The quotations herein given show that in the opinion of the Fathers baptism sustains practically the same relation to the New Dispensation that circumcision sustained to the Old Dispensation; consequently when the New succeeded the Old Dispensation, baptism succeeded circumcision.



## VI.—THE NEW TESTAMENT ON THE QUESTION.

We have already considered “the Jewish Church,” and found that infant children were included in its membership. We have seen how Gentiles, adults and infants, became members (proselytes) of this Church. We have traced the Jewish Church through its transition into the Christian Church. We have heard the Fathers, and considered other evidences, on the continuity of the Church. We have seen that baptism became “the substituted ceremony” for circumcision. It is next in order to inquire what the New Testament teaches on the question of infant Church membership.

1. *The Commission*.—“Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Dr. Wall truly says that “the meaning and full import of a rule given in any old book for the doing of anything is not so well apprehended by us, unless we understand the history of that nation and of that time in which the said rule was given. And this holds especially for such rules as are expressed in very short and general words.” What has already been said, on the subjects named above, will enable us to more fully understand and appreciate the commission which is “expressed in very short and general words.”

(1) Note the difference between the Authorized and Revised Versions. The Revised Version correctly renders the original (*matheteusate*), "make disciples" instead of "teach." Dr. Carson, the great Baptist scholar, says: "It is well known that the word corresponding to teach (A.V.), in the first instance in which it occurs in this passage, signifies *to disciple*, or *make scholars*." This word (*matheteusate*) translated "make disciples" is an aorist imperative. Dr. Winer tells us that "the aorist imperative denotes an action that is either transient and instantaneous, or to be undertaken but once." This, of course, is very different from the word (*didaskontes*) rendered "teaching," in the commission, where the "teaching" must often be repeated, or continued.

(2) A nation consists of both adults and infants. The one class is as much a part of the nation as the other. The commission is not exclusive, but inclusive, therefore a large part of the nations could not have been left out. It is well understood that when a heathen nation heard the gospel, that the parents had to be proselyted before the children could be brought into covenant relation. Like the proselytes who came into the Jewish Church, they were expected to bring their children with them, the same rite being used for both parents and children. The children born after the parents became members were to be baptized, just as the children born to Jewish proselytes, after they became members of the Church, were to be circumcised.

(3) We have abundant evidence that children could become disciples. We are told (Num. iii. 28) that "all the males, from a month old and upward, were . . .



keeping the charge of the sanctuary." An infant that could keep "charge of the sanctuary" certainly could be disciplined in the meaning of the commission. We have every reason to believe that the infants of the nations were included in the commission. It had all along been the custom of the Church of which both Christ and the apostles were members to recognize infant membership. There was no new Church organized. There was not a word said that would lead the apostles to suspect that the infants were to be excluded. The law with which they were familiar recognized infant membership, certainly until that law was repealed the apostles would not think of denying membership to the infant children of believers. That law was never repealed. This was Peter's view, for on the day of Pentecost, he preached that "the promise is unto you, and to your *children*."

Dr. Gallaher declares that there is "no record of any Jew's being baptized but those who rejected the Messiah, and had been, for that 'cut off,' 'excommunicated' (Acts iii. 22, 23) from the Church of God, and had to come back just as the heathen did." These Jews who accepted Christ on this occasion had been broken off because of unbelief, hence when they accepted him as the Messiah, they were baptized into his name. But their infant children, who had been circumcised, and were members of the Church, had not rejected the Messiah, and consequently did not need to be baptized into his name like their parents. According to the doctrine of their Church, baptism could mean nothing more to their infants than circumcision, which they had already received. For these reasons we read of

no infant's being baptized on this occasion; but Peter does not fail to tell them that the promise was to their children.

Justin Martyr, who was born about eighty years later, said, "Several persons among us of sixty and seventy years old, of both sexes, who were discipled to Christ in, or from their childhood, do continue uncorrupted." Here we have several persons who were discipled in childhood, or as Dr. Robinson would put it, while they were "little children," during the ministry of the apostles themselves. Dr. Wall points out the fact that Justin employs the very same word, "were discipled," that the Lord used in the commission. We must therefore, conclude that the commission, as understood by the apostles, fully authorized them to recognize infant Church membership, and that they did so.

2. *Family Baptisms*.—In the account of family baptisms we find two words that must be carefully noted. Dr. William Hamilton speaks of them as follows: "'*Oikos*,' means either a *house* or a *family* contained in it. It has been confounded with '*Oikia*'—which has, in Greek, a larger and more comprehensive meaning, somewhat equivalent to *household*, including servants or slaves. *Oikos* is the word, which occurs in connection with what have been loosely called '*household baptisms*.' That it has special reference to children, we may learn from the Greek of the Septuagint, 2 Sam. vii. 11, 25, 27, where an *Oikos*, 'a house,' is promised to David. In 1 Kings xi. 38, a similar promise of a family ('*Oikos*') is made to Solomon. In Deut. xxv. 9, the law is given respecting the building up of a brother's '*oikos*,' by the marriage of his widow.

Paul exhorts young women, 1 Tim. v. 14, to marry, bear children, and rule the house, or to *despotize* the '*oikos*.' Many more examples might be given, evidently signifying or including little children, infants.

"The narrative of the centurion's conversion, Acts x., affords a fine illustration of the difference between *oikos* and *oikia*. Cornelius feared God with all his family (*oikos*). He saw a vision in his private residence (*oikos*) and sent messengers to Joppa, who found Peter in the *oikia* of Simon the tanner. This *oikia* of Simon is mentioned repeatedly in the narrative. Simon's house (*oikia*) included large premises. His *oikos* is not mentioned at all. The distinction thus maintained is uniformly observed in the Scriptures."

It is worthy of note that every instance of a family baptism recorded in the New Testament is that of a Gentile, where faith is affirmed of a head of the family only. How does it happen that no family baptisms occurred among the Jews, who by thousands accepted Christ as the Messiah? It must have been for the reason just assigned for no children's being baptized on the day of Pentecost. The children of the Jews had been circumcised, and were already in covenant relation. They had not by unbelief been broken off, and hence did not need the sign of being "grafted in." When Gentile parents were admitted to the Church by baptism, without circumcision, their children were admitted by the same rite.

It will be next in order to examine the family baptisms recorded in the New Testament.

(1) "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped

God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, if ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us " (Acts xvi. 14, 15, R. V.). The pronoun " us " means Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke. These men went on for some days with their gospel work, when Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. After their release they saw the brethren (Timothy and Luke), and " comforted them, and departed " (verse 40).

Observe that Lydia alone worshipped God; she alone heard the gospel; it was her heart that God opened; she alone extended an invitation to these men to go into her house; she alone constrained them; yet she and " her household " (*oikos*) had been baptized.

Now there were other persons besides herself baptized. There is not a word said about their believing. We have no right to presume that they did believe. Were these persons old enough to exercise faith, or were they infant children? We have seen that the original word (*oikos*) is the word used to " signify or include little children, infants." There is no reason why we should depart from the general law of interpretation. In view of all the recorded facts, and the use of this word, we are led to the conclusion that those baptized with Lydia were infants.

One of two things is true. Either those baptized were infants, and were baptized on the faith of Lydia, or they were old enough to exercise faith for themselves, but not doing so, were baptized without faith. "But," some interpose, "we *infer* that all who were baptized

with Lydia were old enough to exercise faith, and did so, though there is no record of the fact." To this it may be replied that others have equally as good a right to *infer* that those who were baptized along with Lydia were infant children; yes, a better right, when it is remembered that *oikos* includes "little children, infants."

(2) "And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set meat before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God" (Acts xvi. 32-34, R.V.). In this case there are both a family (*oikos*) and certain other persons (who with the family are called an *oikia*).

The jailer inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" The reply was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (*oikos*, family). "And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house" (*oikia*, including, perhaps prisoners and servants). The narrative goes on to say that "he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his immediately." "Then he took them into his (*oikos*) his family apartments, set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his (*oikos*) family. The Greek words for believing and rejoicing, in this passage, are in the singular number. He believed and rejoiced as the representative of the family, who believed and rejoiced *with* him and *in* him. The Abrahamic covenant included the children. It was preached by Paul, and exemplified by the jailer *and* his family."

In the Greek, the phrase "with all his house," is one



single word (*panoiki*), an adverb modifying the verb "rejoiced"—and it tells how, or in what manner, he rejoiced.

Dr. Gallaher says: "He rejoiced 'domestically,' or over his children, now 'discipled' to the Lord Jesus. He rejoiced just as any other fond parent will, when he has realized the full meaning of what the apostle said when he told him in verse 31, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved *and thy family*.' The penitent, convicted jailer simply believed the word of the apostles—as the ministers and servants of the Lord Jesus—and when he had taken God at his word, he was willing to trust the Lord for the salvation of his children, and he 'rejoiced'—was filled with joy inexpressible—at the privilege of having his children 'discipled' and 'baptized' along with himself."

The use of these words (*oikos* and *oikia*) indicate that there were small children in the jailer's family. Unless we go beyond the record it is certain that none believed except the jailer himself. The Greek text positively settles that. It is equally certain that others besides the jailer were baptized. As in the case of Lydia, these other persons must have been small children who were baptized on the faith of the father; or else they were competent to exercise faith, but not doing so, were baptized without it. The objector to infant church membership may take either horn of the dilemma he pleases.

(3) "And I baptized the household (*oikos*) of Stephanas" (1 Cor. i. 16). What has already been said on the word family (*oikos*) is equally applicable here. Dr. Hamilton says, "that there were infant children in each *oikos* (family) of those who have mentioned amounts to

a moral certainty." Dr. Summers thinks that "the families baptized were more likely to comprehend children than adults, for the latter would not have been baptized except on their personal profession of faith, whereas the children would be baptized on the responsibility of their parents. Hence the frequency of family baptisms." But in the cases of Lydia and the jailer, we found that persons were baptized without making any profession of faith. Inasmuch as we can hardly believe that the missionaries would have baptized adults without such a requirement, we are forced to the conclusion that the term family (*oikos*) is to be taken in its original signification as "including little children, infants." In the case of Stephanas we do not have as many facts from which we may draw conclusions, but yet there is no apparent reason for changing the meaning of the word family (*oikos*) from its usual signification.

3. *Circumcision in the Apostolic Times.*—Attention has already been called to the fact that the Jewish Christians continued to practice circumcision for a long time. Twenty years after Pentecost a council was held in Jerusalem to consider whether the law of circumcision should be enforced on the Gentiles, who desired to become Christians. It was decided not to require this of the Gentiles. See Acts xv.

Tertullian makes the following comment on the result of this council: "The reason why the Holy Spirit did, when the apostles at that time were consulting, relax the bond and yoke for us (Gentiles), was that we might be free to devote ourselves to the shunning of idolatry." He, therefore, understood that the Jewish Christians practiced circumcision.



James and the elders at Jerusalem said unto Paul: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law; and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children" (Acts xxi. 20,21). This was eight years after the council of which we have a record in chapter xv., or twenty-eight years after Pentecost, when the apostles began their work under the great commission.

In all this time these Jews continued to practice circumcision, and that too, without the opposition, if not by the teaching of the apostles. This clearly establishes the fact that the apostles understood that children were to continue to sustain the same relation to the Church under the New Dispensation that they had sustained under the Old Dispensation. Suppose the council at Jerusalem had decided that it was necessary for the Gentiles, in becoming Christians, to be circumcised, would they not have been expected to have their children circumcised according to the law? Since only baptism was required of the Gentiles, would they not, according to the law of making proselytes, be expected to have their children baptized?

We have seen that Christ named baptism instead of circumcision in the commission. Suppose that he had said to the apostles: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, circumcising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," would they not all have understood that infant children were to be circumcised?

## VII.—THE FATHERS ON THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS.

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The writings of the Fathers are very voluminous. Only a few selections can be presented in the space set apart for this phase of our subject. In the very beginning it must be noted that the Fathers often use the words "baptism" and "regeneration" interchangeably. Irenaeus speaks of a class of men "instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God." He informs us that Christ gave to "the disciples the power of regeneration unto God." He also refers to "that regeneration which takes place by means of the laver." Justin Martyr says: "Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water." Augustin affirms that "infant children, even when they are newly born, can be delivered from perdition in no other way than through the grace of Christ's name, which he has given in his sacraments." Ambrose says: "Nor is there the sacrament of regeneration without water." In the light of this interchangeable use of the words "baptism" and "regeneration" some of the following quotations will be more easily understood. The fact that some of the Fathers attributed a saving efficacy to baptism does not affect

the testimony which they bear to the fact that infants were baptized. In their opinion baptism had the same effect on adults that it had on infants.

1. *Irenaeus*.—This Father was born early in the second century, and lived to its close. He was a pupil of Polycarp who suffered martyrdom about 167, at the age of 90. Polycarp had been a pupil of St. John by whom he was consecrated bishop of Smyrna. Irenaeus says that "Polycarp was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried (on earth) a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. For these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time." He informs us that he could "describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and the others who had seen the Lord, and as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eye witnesses of the Word of life, Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures." Polycarp received the doctrines of Christ from St. John and others who had seen

the Lord. Irenaeus was a pupil of Polycarp, so he becomes a very valuable witness as to the practice of the Church, not only in his own time, but also in the apostolic times, for "through this link (Polycarp) he still was connected with the Johannean age. The spirit of his preceptor passed over to him." Hear what he says: "For he (Christ) came to save all through means of himself—all, I say, who through him are born again (regenerated) to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men." The fact has already been pointed out that Irenaeus speaks of "baptism which is regeneration to God," and that other Fathers write in the same way. When he mentions infants "born again (regenerated) to God," he evidently means the baptizing of them. So here we have the testimony of a man who received his authority from an eye witness of the apostles, and had received from John himself the teachings of Christ.

2. *Tertullian*.—This writer lived in the last part of the second century. He says: "According to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary—if (baptism itself) is not so necessary—that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger?" The foregoing has frequently been quoted to prove that Tertullian was opposed to the baptism of infants. But those who do so misapprehend his meaning. "For no less cause," he continues, "must the unwedded also be deferred—in whom the ground of temptation is prepared, alike in such as never were wedded by means of their maturity, and in the widowed by means of

their freedom—until they either marry, or else be more fully strengthened for continence. If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay: sound faith is secure of salvation.” Tertullian was just as much opposed to the baptism of the “unwedded,” whether they were “such as never were wedded,” or the “widowed” as he was to the “baptism of infants.” He would delay baptism in all cases until such time as the danger of losing its benefit before death might be removed. We are not concerned so much with either *his opinion*, or the *opinions* of other Fathers, as we are with the simple testimony which they bear to facts. According to Tertullian, the Church in his time baptized infants. He did not object to their being baptized on the ground that it was an innovation. His *opinion* on the question of the baptism of infants has no more weight than his opinion that “such as never were wedded” and “the widowed” should not be baptized. Yet his testimony to the fact that the Church gave baptism to infants is of great value.

3. *Origen*.—Origen lived from 185 to 254. His father was a Christian, and he was brought up in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and was doubtless familiar with the practice of the Church. Through his Christian father, whom he exhorted to suffer martyrdom rather than recant, he had undoubtedly learned the customs of the Church as far back as the first half of the second century. Eusebius assures us that his forefathers had been Christians for several generations. His grandfather or his great grandfather must have lived in the apostles’ time, so that he could easily learn

from his own family what the practice of the Church had been. Moreover he traveled throughout the empire, visiting many of the large cities, including Rome, and spent a part of his life in Palestine. So by observation he would know the practice of the Churches; and if there had been any difference in their practice he would most certainly have referred to it.

Dr. Wall quotes Origen as follows: "Let it be considered, what is the reason that whereas the baptism of the Church is given for forgiveness of sins, infants also are by the usage of the Church baptized: when if there were nothing in infants that wanted forgiveness and mercy, the grace of baptism would be needless to them. . . . For this also it was, that the Church had from the apostles a tradition (or order) to give baptism to infants."

From this Father we learn two things. (1) That beyond all doubt the early Church did give baptism to infants, and (2) that the Church had instructions from the apostles to that effect. Dr. Wall observes: "The plainness of these testimonies is such as needs nothing to be said of it, nor admits anything to be said against it. They do not only suppose the practice to be generally known and used, but also mention its being ordered by the apostles."

4. *Cyprian*.—This learned man was baptized into the Christian faith about 245. He wrote to Fidus what the decision of a council was on the question, not whether infants should be baptized, but whether they should be *baptized before the eighth day*. After setting forth his argument he says: "If even to the greatest sinners, and to those who had sinned much against



God, when they subsequently believed, remission of sins is granted—and nobody is hindered from baptism and from grace—how much rather ought we to shrink from hindering an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam.” There was no question raised here as to whether the baptism of infants was scriptural, and in accordance with the practice of the Church. There is no doubt that the settled policy of the Church was to baptize infants. The question which Fidus had presented, and on which the council (of sixty-six) had passed, was, whether an infant might be baptized before it was eight days old. As has been seen Cyprian reported that it was not necessary to wait even until the child was eight days old to baptize it.

5. *Augustin.*—This noted man lived from 354 to 430. In his letter to Boniface he says: “You ask me to state ‘whether parents do harm to their baptized infant children, when they attempt to heal them in time of sickness by sacrifices to the false gods of the heathen.’” His answer may be summed up in his own words as follows: “When the grace of Christ has been once received, the child does not lose it otherwise than by his own impiety, if, when he becomes older, he turn out so ill. For by that time he will begin to have sins of his own, which cannot be removed by regeneration, but must be healed by other remedial measures.” In the same letter he speaks thus: “An infant, although he is not yet a believer in the sense of having that faith which includes the consenting will of those who exercise it, nevertheless becomes a believer through the sacrament of that faith. For as it is answered that he



believes, so also he is called a believer, not because he assents to the truth by an act of his own judgment, but because he receives the sacrament of that truth. When, however, he begins to have the discretion of manhood, he will not repeat the sacrament, but understand its meaning, and become conformed to the truth which it contains, with his will also consenting."

From the short references given, the conclusion is inevitable that it was the custom of the Christian Church in its early history to baptize infants. We are not concerned with the peculiar theological view of any of these early writers. They have been introduced to prove a fact—the fact that the baptism of infants was a doctrine believed and practiced by the early Christians. If the testimony of the Fathers can be relied on, and as to the matter of fact it certainly can be, there can be no doubt of the attitude of the Church on this question during the first four hundred years of the Christian era. Augustin sums it up in these words: "If any one seek for divine authority in this matter (baptism of infants), though what is held by the whole Church, and that not as instituted by councils, but as a matter of invariable custom, is rightly held to have been handed down by apostolical authority, still we can form a true conjecture of the value of the sacrament of baptism in the case of infants, from the parallel of circumcision, which was received by God's earlier people."

Those who do not believe in the baptism of infants have never been able to agree among themselves as to the time or the place of its origin. It is rather singular that such an innovation could have crept into the Church without ever receiving any notice from the his-

torians and other writers, who were ever ready to spy out anything new. Dr. Schaff says: "No time can be assigned to the beginning of the practice of infant baptism. If it had been an innovation, it would have created a revolution, or at all events provoked a violent protest, but it gained ground gradually from the very beginning, as Christianity took hold of family life and training."

We have seen that Christ and the apostles were all members of the Jewish Church; that that Church passing through a transition became what was later called the Christian Church; that no new Church was organized; that it was the custom in the times of our Savior to admit children to membership in the Church; that he did not repeal the law; that the New Testament implies, if it does not give a positive statement, that infants were to enjoy this privilege; and finally that the testimony of the Fathers establishes the fact that the early Church did admit infants to membership.

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